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ABSTRACT

This report provides teachers, school administrators, students, and the general public with a summarized overview of results from the January 1997 administration of the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination. The summary is divided into: (1) description of the examination; (2) achievement of standards; (3) provincial averages; (4) multiple-choice questions with analysis of difficulty, examiners' comments, and a breakdown of certain questions and responses; and (5) writing assignments analyses with examiners' comments on the students' responses to the four types of questions. (EH)

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Alberta Dept. of Education, Edmonton. Student Evaluation Branch.

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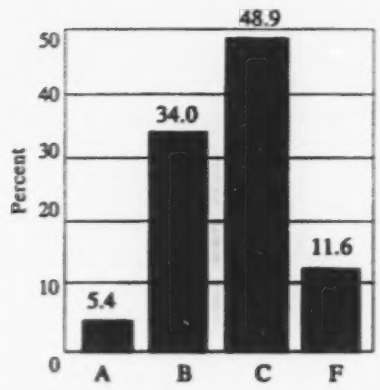
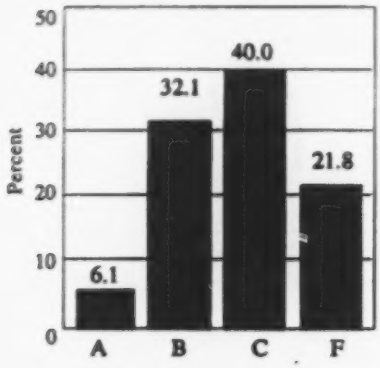
Social Studies 33

Diploma Examination Results
Examiners' Report for January 1997

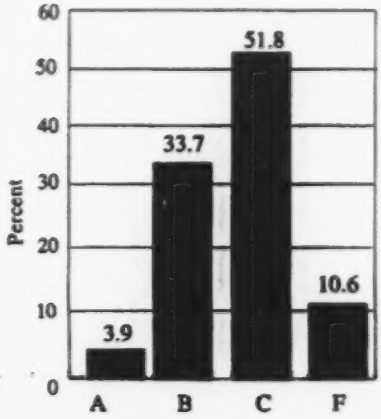
School-Awarded Mark



Diploma Examination Mark



Final Course Mark



The summary information in this report provides teachers, school administrators, students, and the general public with an overview of results from the January 1997 administration of the Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination. This information is most helpful when used in conjunction with the detailed school and jurisdiction reports that have been provided to schools and school jurisdiction offices. A provincial report containing a detailed analysis of the combined January, June, and August results is made available annually.

Description of the Examination

The Social Studies 33 Diploma Examination consists of 60 multiple-choice questions worth 60% and four writing assignments worth 40% of the total examination mark.

Achievement of Standards

The information reported is based on the final course marks achieved by 5 761 students who wrote the January 1997 examination.

- 89.4% of these students achieved the acceptable standard (a final course mark of 50% or higher).
- 3.9% of these students achieved the standard of excellence (a final course mark of 80% or higher).

Overall, student achievement in Social Studies 33 was satisfactory. Students demonstrated a good understanding of Social Studies knowledge and skills on the multiple-choice questions; however, the writing assignments presented greater difficulty for many students. The average score on the writing assignments was significantly lower than the average score on the multiple-choice questions.

Provincial Averages

- The average school-awarded mark was 61.3%.
- The average diploma examination mark was 60.0%.
- The average final course mark, representing an equal weighting of the school-awarded mark and the diploma examination mark, was 61.0%.

Multiple-Choice Questions

Examination Blueprint

There are 60 multiple-choice questions each worth one mark. Questions are classified in two ways: according to the curricular content area (topic) being tested and according to the knowledge and skill objectives required to answer the question. The examination blueprint illustrates the distribution of questions in January 1997 according to these classifications.

All questions on the diploma examination require students to demonstrate knowledge of social studies content and to apply social studies skills to that knowledge base. The reporting categories below define the general types of questions that appear on the examination and the categories for which information is reported.

Question Classification by Knowledge and Skill Objectives	Question Classification by Topic		Total Questions
	Topic A: Political and Economic Systems Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the world's political and economic systems as outlined in the *Program of Studies.*	**Topic B: Global Interaction in the 20th Century** Knowledge and application of facts, concepts, and generalizations related to the interaction of nations since 1918 as outlined in the *Program of Studies.*	
Understanding Information and Ideas These questions require students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of generalizations, key concepts, and related facts and content.	31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 40, 41, 43, 46, 47, 49, 50, 55, 57, 58	1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 23, 25, 26, 30	29
Interpreting Information and Ideas These questions require students to use their understanding of social studies to analyze and interpret information and ideas.	34, 39, 42, 44, 48, 51, 53, 54, 56	3, 9, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29	20
Applying Information and Ideas These questions require students to demonstrate their understanding of social studies by applying information and ideas.	37, 38, 45, 52, 59, 60	4, 5, 6, 15, 28	11
Total Questions	**30**	**30**	**60**

*Subtest Results**

Results are reported in average raw scores. Total of all multiple-choice questions: 38.7 out of 60

by Topic
- Political and Economic Systems: 19.2 out of 30
- Global Interaction in the 20th Century: 19.5 out of 30

by Knowledge and Skill Objectives
- Understanding Information and Ideas: 19.0 out of 29
- Interpreting Information and Ideas: 12.9 out of 20
- Applying Information and Ideas: 6.8 out of 11

*Readers are cautioned not to compare subtest results because the subtests are not of equal difficulty. Instead, readers should compare these provincial subtest results with their own school results.

Question-by-Question Results

Question	Key	Difficulty*
1	A	82.9
2	C	62.7
3	D	45.8
4	B	29.2
5	A	81.1
6	C	89.6
7	D	43.3
8	C	63.0
9	B	66.6
10	D	42.4
11	B	67.2
12	A	80.7
13	B	83.2
14	C	50.5
15	D	61.0
16	D	62.4
17	A	61.5
18	B	69.8
19	D	54.3
20	C	57.1
21	C	79.6
22	B	65.5
23	D	62.1
24	B	77.3
25	C	48.1
26	B	75.5
27	D	62.4
28	A	83.0
29	D	73.5
30	B	66.2
31	A	83.7
32	B	64.3
33	A	45.1
34	A	64.0
35	C	65.5
36	C	64.9
37	A	67.5
38	B	73.7
39	D	66.9
40	C	49.6
41	D	68.6
42	B	88.0
43	D	45.7
44	A	55.1
45	D	59.8
46	A	75.6
47	A	78.4
48	A	52.3
49	D	65.9
50	A	75.1
51	D	86.9
52	B	57.7
53	A	55.2
54	C	51.1
55	C	72.5
56	C	73.6
57	B	73.7
58	C	66.7
59	A	31.1
60	B	44.8

*Difficulty—percentage of students answering the question correctly

The table at the left shows question-by-question results and the keyed answers. Parallel tables in the school and jurisdiction reports show the percentage of students who selected each alternative. By comparing school and jurisdiction results with provincial results presented here, teachers can determine areas of strength and weakness in the achievement of their students and, consequently, areas of potential strength and weakness in their programs.

Examiners' Comments

The multiple-choice questions require students to go beyond simply recalling information and to apply their knowledge and thinking skills. Students must demonstrate that they understand social studies concepts; that they comprehend historical, political, and economic relationships; and that they can interpret and evaluate social studies information and ideas.

The following table gives results for six questions selected from the examination. The table shows the percentage of students, in three groups, that answered each question correctly. The comments on pages 4 and 5 discuss some of the decisions that students may have made and some of the skills they may have used to answer these questions correctly.

Percentage of Students Correctly Answering Selected Multiple-Choice Questions

	Question Number					
Student Group	**3**	**4**	**12**	**30**	**51**	**52**
All students	45.8	29.2	80.7	66.2	86.9	57.7
Students achieving the *standard of excellence* (80% or higher, or A) on the whole examination	72.3	66.9	89.4	93.1	96.9	92.3
Students achieving the *acceptable standard* who received marks between 50% and 64%, or C, on the whole examination	43.5	22.3	81.5	63.0	87.5	51.8

The map on which questions 3 and 4 are based can be found on page 2 of the examination.

3. On which pre-1919 European empire does the map focus?

   A. Turkish
   B. German
   C. Russian
   *D. Austro-Hungarian

4. *Following the First World War, many new nations were created from territories shown on the map.*

   These territorial changes were based on the principle of

   A. collective security to preserve peace
   *B. self-determination for ethnic groups
   C. isolationism from international conflicts
   D. appeasement of aggressive dictatorships

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12. At the **beginning** of the Cold War, American foreign policy focused on

   *A. preventing communist expansion
   B. encouraging economic prosperity in Europe
   C. reducing political unrest in the Third World
   D. preventing conflict between Western and Asian states

Questions 3 and 4 both refer to a map showing the multi-ethnic composition of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Question 3 required students to interpret information from the map in order to identify the European empire on which the map focuses. The correct answer was selected by 45.8% of all students (72.3% of students achieving the standard of excellence and 43.5% of students achieving a mark between 50% and 64% on the exam).

The difficulty of this question suggests that many students are unfamiliar with the underlying causes of the "disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian empire and the creation of new states" (*Social Studies 33 Program of Studies*).

Question 4 was even more difficult and required students to apply information provided to determine the underlying principle guiding the territorial changes illustrated. Only 29.2% of all students selected the correct response. However, the question discriminated well, with 66.9% of the students achieving the standard of excellence selecting the correct response, which contrasts sharply with the 22.3% of students achieving a mark between 50% and 64% who selected the correct response.

Self-determination is an important concept set out in the *Program of Studies*, yet students are clearly unsure as to its application in the context of historical events.

Question 12 proved to be one of the easier questions on the examination. This question required students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension of American foreign policy objectives at the beginning of the Cold War. The correct answer was chosen by 80.7% of all students. The success rate among students achieving the standard of excellence was 89.4%. Among students achieving a mark between 50% and 64%, the correct response was selected by 81.5% of students. Even among students who failed the exam, the correct answer was identified by 63.9% of students.

The results on this question show that, generally, Social Studies 33 students clearly understand the underlying causes of the Cold War.

30. Of the following, which pair of nations has remained allies **most consistently** throughout the twentieth century?

A. France and Italy
*B. Great Britain and Canada
C. Japan and the United States
D. Germany and the Soviet Union

The results for **question 30** provide insight into the contrasting abilities of students at various levels of achievement to develop a generalization concerning Canadian foreign policy throughout the twentieth century. Overall, the question was of average difficulty (66.2% of all students selected the correct response); however, there is a noticeable difference when three levels of achievement are compared. Among students achieving the standard of excellence, 93.1% selected the correct response. For students achieving a mark between 50% and 64%, the correct response was selected by 63.0%. Only 33.3% of students who failed the multiple-choice section of the examination,selected the correct response.

This type of question requires students to demonstrate their understanding of a larger historical trend, rather than of an isolated event. There is a very strong correlation between success at this task and success on the multiple-choice questions as a whole.

The map on which questions 51 and 52 are based can be found on page 33 of the examination.

51. According to the map, a political party would have the **best** chance of forming the government if it gained widespread popularity in

A. British Columbia and the North
B. the Atlantic provinces
C. the Prairie provinces
*D. Quebec and Ontario

Questions 51 and **52** refer to a map of Canada displaying the distribution of seats in the Canadian House of Commons in 1997. These two questions provide very interesting results. Students achieving the standard of excellence on the exam recorded consistent results on both questions. On question 51, 96.9% of these students selected the correct response, and on question 52, there was a similar result (92.3%).

52. By studying the information on the map, it is possible to determine the

A. popularity of each political party across Canada
*B. general distribution of population across Canada
C. proportion of citizens who vote in federal elections
D. number of political parties competing in federal elections

Among students achieving the acceptable standard, 87.5% selected the correct response to question 51, yet on question 52, this total declined to 51.8%. Among students who failed the exam, 71.5% selected the correct response to question 51, but on question 52, only 27.0% chose the correct response. In summary, on question 51, the difference between the highest and lowest achieving students is about 25%, but on question 52, this difference increases to about 65%. Few students at any level of achievement had difficulty with the geographic and mathematical aspects of question 51; however, in question 52, which requires the application of information contained in the map to new situation, there was a pronounced decline in success among all groups except the highest achievers.

Writing Assignments

The Social Studies 33 examination contains four writing assignments positioned throughout the examination. Each assignment is related to a specific curricular theme and assesses several skills. Readers will find the written-response results most meaningful in the context of the assignments and the scoring descriptors.

The scoring criteria applied to evaluate student performance are the same for each assignment. These criteria are found on pages 32 and 33 of the 1996–97 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin, Diploma Examinations Program*. As a result of consultation with teachers serving as standard establishers for the marking of the 1996 writing assignments, changes were made to the descriptors for the major scoring category *Ideas and Support* from those presented in the 1995–96 bulletin.

The table on this page outlines the requirements for each assignment, the categories for scoring each assignment, the amount each category contributes to the total mark of the examination, and the percentage of students achieving at the various levels. In January 1997, the average raw score for the writing assignment section of the examination was 21.2 out of 40.

The most useful starting place for reviewing the results is at the **Satisfactory (3)** level. Such work exceeds the pass mark of 50%.

Examination Blueprint and Percentage Distribution of Scores

Description of the Writing Assignment*	Scoring Category	Proportion of Total Mark (%)	Percentage Distribution of Scores									
			Excellent (5)	(4.5)	Competent (4)	(3.5)	Satisfactory (3)	(2.5)	Limited (2)	(1.5)	Poor (1)	Ins**
Writing Assignment I Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.0	2.1	7.3	10.0	21.0	19.4	23.7	9.0	5.0	1.5
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.2	2.0	9.1	13.9	38.1	19.0	11.2	2.9	1.2	1.5
Writing Assignment II Interpretation of Visual Images	Ideas and Support	7.5	0.9	1.5	8.2	11.5	30.7	21.3	18.7	4.4	1.9	0.9
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.1	1.7	9.4	14.1	42.3	17.0	10.6	2.2	0.7	0.9
Writing Assignment III Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts	Ideas and Support	7.5	1.3	2.0	7.4	9.5	19.6	15.8	20.6	9.0	6.9	8.0
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	1.0	1.8	7.4	10.2	32.3	17.7	14.7	4.5	2.3	8.0
Writing Assignment IV Contemporary Issues	Ideas and Support	7.5	0.9	1.5	7.5	10.9	26.2	20.3	19.7	7.1	3.5	2.4
	Communication of Ideas	2.5	0.8	1.3	7.5	12.0	37.6	19.7	13.2	3.7	1.7	2.4

*See pages 17 and 18 of the 1995–96 *Social Studies 33 Information Bulletin* for a detailed description of the Writing Assignments.

** **Ins** (Insufficient) is a special category that includes students who did not attempt the assignment, who wrote too little to evaluate, or who wrote answers that were completely off topic.

Note: The shaded portion represents the percentage of students who achieved or exceeded a **Satisfactory** standard of performance.

Examiners' Comments

The January 1997 diploma examination provided many insights into the ability of students in Social Studies 33 to apply and communicate knowledge and ideas in written form. After three administrations, there remains a concern that the mean score on the written portion of the examination was only slightly above 50% (21.2 out of 40). Standards confirmers and markers, however, were generally positive that both the writing assignments and scoring criteria were appropriate. Reports from schools and markers indicate that the examination was completed in the allotted time. The majority of students completed all writing assignments.

Writing Assignment I: Contemporary Issues

Writing Assignment I required students to express and support their ideas in response to an "editorial" suggesting that, for the sake of global security, it is regrettable that the Cold War has ended. The specific question asked of students was: *Do you agree with the editor's conclusion? Why or why not?* Most students were clearly able to manage this task (on the *Ideas and Support* scale, almost 61% of students achieved a mark at or above the acceptable standard, and on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, over 83% of students achieved marks at or above the acceptable standard). Only 1.5% were deemed INS.

Markers reported that, generally, students stayed on task and provided appropriate responses. Many students were able to cite accurate information to support their viewpoints. Many markers expressed the concern that a significant number of students overutilized the information provided in the editorial and the related multiple-choice questions, and demonstrated a minimal attempt to provide original thought. This indicates that it remains a daunting task for many students to use information provided in the examination selectively and appropriately to support original thought. Some of these students may not have an adequate grasp of course content to do otherwise, however some may simply have made a choice to rely on examination materials.

Students achieving **(3) Satisfactory** typically adopted a discernible position that was supported by reference to appropriate historic and current events; for example, the peaceful resolution of the 1962 Cuban Crisis or the civil war in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. Support, while appropriate, was often brief and tended to be superficial.

Students meeting the **(4) Competent** and **(5) Excellent** standards demonstrated a better understanding of the more subtle nuances of the issue; for example, that international stability during the Cold War was achieved at a very high price in terms of military spending and in creating a climate of international apprehension and fear. These students generally demonstrated a broader understanding of history.

Writing Assignment II: Interpreting Visual Images

The section of the examination focusing on the contemporary world contained the Visual Images writing assignment. Two images were presented: a propaganda poster and a photograph. The poster shows a woman with upraised arms as a fleet of airplanes flies overhead. The poster contains an encouraging message: "Women of Britain—Come into the Factories." The photograph shows a woman in Central America in the 1980s holding a machine gun in one arm and a baby in the other. Students were asked to respond to the question: *What idea(s) do the poster and photograph convey about the changing roles of women during times of military conflict in the twentieth century?*

Despite the apprehensions of some markers, students handled this assignment better than the other three: on the *Ideas and Support* scale, over 74% of students achieved a mark at or above the acceptable standard, and on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, almost 86% of students did so. Of the four writing assignments, this assignment also had the lowest INS rate at 0.9%.

Markers reported that most students remained focused on the assigned task, and usually made references to one or both of the visual images. Markers were concerned that some students simply provided a "you've come a long way, baby" response, suggesting that, in some way, the woman in the photograph was a symbol of female achievement and liberation, rather than a woman who, perhaps regrettably, had become a frontline participant in armed conflict. Nonetheless, it was clear that most students were actively engaged by the topic.

Several problems continue to plague students who fail to achieve the acceptable standard on the visual interpretation assignment. In some cases, they simply describe each image and make little or no attempt to identify a common link between the two images. Others who failed to meet the acceptable standard wrote about the changing roles of women in general terms with no reference to the images, or presented a discussion of wartime roles and their evolution. Yet others discussed one image in some detail but made minimal or no reference to the other.

The students who achieved **(3) Satisfactory** typically structured their responses in a conventional manner. They usually referred to each image and then discussed the overall message drawn from the pair of images. At this level, the responses focused on the idea that women today are much freer to choose a societal role than were women in the past who were simply integrated into the force of people used to conduct warfare.

Students who achieved **(4) Competent** or **(5) Excellent** were more thoughtful and insightful. They commonly discussed details in each image, then clearly linked them to a general theme. For example, some students discussed the "balancing act" evident in the photograph where a women cradles both a gun and a child. Students at this level of achievement demonstrated an understanding that the images did not necessarily represent a movement of liberation, but rather a shifting view of the types of wartime participation that have become acceptable for women.

Writing Assignment III: Comprehension of Generalizations and Concepts

Writing Assignment III required students to recall specific course content and use it in conjunction with ideas and information contained within the examination to respond to the question: *What are the advantages and disadvantages of a free-market economic system?*

In contrast to Writing Assignment II, the general feeling of markers before beginning the marking process was that this question would be the easiest for students to address. Just the opposite occurred however, with this assignment proving to be the most difficult. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, about 56% of students achieved a mark at or above the acceptable standard, and on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, almost 71% of students did so. Of the four writing assignments, this one had the highest INS rate (8.0%).

On the diploma examinations, which have been administered since January 1996, this type of assignment has proven to be the most difficult for students. Unlike the other three, students are not provided with prompts, such as visual images or textual sources. Rather, they are simply asked to answer a straightforward question. Many markers noted, however, that at least ten of the preceding multiple-choice questions had information that was useful as a resource for this writing assignment. It is interesting to note that question 31 directly identifies the term "free-market economy" and was one of the easier exam questions (83.7% of students selected the correct response). Yet for some reason, students appeared to be confused when the term "free-market economy" was used in the writing assignment.

Among students who failed to meet the acceptable standard on this assignment were 8.0% who either did not attempt the assignment or who provided answers that did not address the question asked. There is certainly reason for concern when roughly one out of every twelve students in Social Studies 33 cannot, at the end of course, explain with any accuracy the advantages and disadvantages of a free-market economy. Among those students who did not achieve the acceptable standard, a common problem was confusion of economic systems. Many described advantages and disadvantages more commonly associated with centrally planned economies and/or discussed the advantages and disadvantages of political rather than economic systems.

The students who achieved a **(3) Satisfactory** demonstrated an adequate, if somewhat simplistic, understanding of the workings of a free-market economy. Students at the **(4) Competent** and **(5) Excellent** levels were comfortable with the topic and, in many cases, were able to differentiate between "theoretical" and "real-world" free-market economies. These students also applied information from the multiple-choice questions correctly and effectively.

Writing Assignment IV: Contemporary Issues

The final writing assignment on the January 1997 examination required students to read the responses of four federal election candidates to the question: *Should participation in extremist political movements in Canada be illegal?* The task asked students to explain which candidate they would vote for, and why.

The results of this writing assignment were similar to those of Writing Assignment I. On the *Ideas and Support* scale, about 67% of students achieved a mark at or above the acceptable standard, and on the *Communication of Ideas* scale, almost 79% of students did so. The INS rate on this assignment was 2.4%.

Markers observed that the majority of students stayed on task and provided appropriate responses. Markers also observed that, as with Writing Assignment I, some students relied too heavily on the comments of the candidates without adding much original thought or specific examples to support their choice. The commentaries of the candidates have been designed in such a way that there is room for students to complete a candidate's argumentation by providing specific historical or contemporary examples. This issue lent itself to the examples of Nazi extremism in Germany or the rising influence of para-military groups in the United States.

Among responses that failed to meet the acceptable standard, it was common for students to confuse the candidates' opinions. They indicated their support for one candidate by offering argumentation that was consistent with the opinions of another candidate, leaving in doubt their choice of candidate. Another problem was that some students demonstrated confusion about the meaning of the term "extremist."

Students achieving **(3) Satisfactory** typically understood the position of their chosen candidate and provided support with one or more appropriate arguments. These arguments may or may not have included specific references to historical and/or current affairs, but were adequate and relatively free from major error.

Students achieving **(4) Competent** and **(5) Excellent** demonstrated a thoughtful understanding of the issue, and many of them noted the irony inherent in denying freedom of speech and action to some in order to preserve "democracy" for all. Some students not only defended their choice of candidate, but also discredited the other candidates by discussing the flaws in their arguments.

For further information, contact Tim Coates (TCoates@edc.gov.ab.ca) or Elana Scraba (escraba@edc.gov.ab.ca)at the Student Evaluation Branch, 427-0010. To call toll-free from outside of Edmonton, dial 310-0000.

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